

O N D R U M S

Hot Rod Mufflers

How do you keep the sounds you want, and stifle the ones you don't?

BOB SAYDLOWSKI

EXCESSIVELY ringy drums can raise havoc with your PA and your on-stage sound. While some drummers like to run their drums "wide open," most of us prefer a little dampening to get rid of overring and dissonant overtones. There are many methods of muffling—I could write a book (and maybe I will someday)—but here are a few ideas to get you started.

On Edge

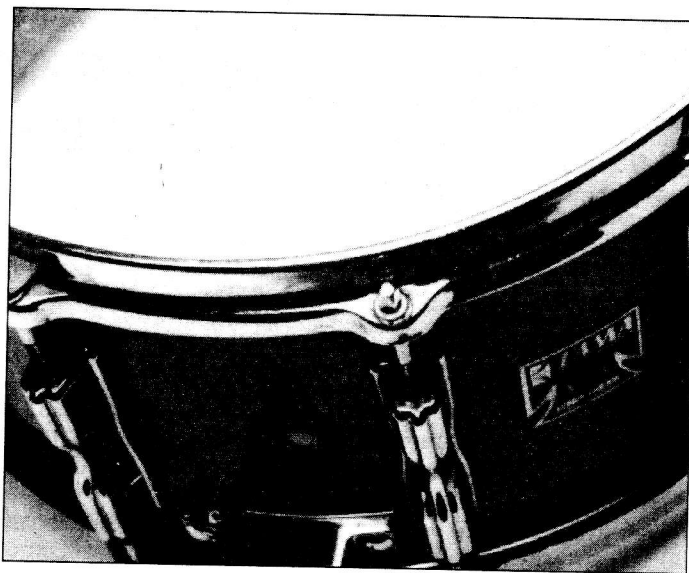
Since most unwanted overtones emanate from the outer edge of the drumhead, this is the logical spot to begin. One common and inexpensive method is to apply pieces of duct tape at the edge of the batter head. To find the approximate location, hit the drum, and lightly touch the head near a different tuning rod each time. At some points you'll find the overtones will decrease, and this is where you'll want to put your duct tape.

Experimentation will dictate the amount of tape you want to use; sometimes you may need to double-layer it. Keep the tape away from where you actually strike the head, as it could develop into a sticky mess if you're constantly hitting the tape and tearing it away—besides, you want it near the edges only.

Certain drumheads have muffling characteristics, such as Remo's Pinstripe, Aquarian's Studio-X, and Evans' Hydraulic heads. The Evans heads are 2-ply with a light filling of oil, while the others control the sound from the outer edges either with a double lamination, or an applied ring.

Add-ons

Some companies have taken this a step further with mylar overlay rings, ranging from 1/4 to 1-inch widths. These sit on top of the batter head, doubling the thickness of the outer perimeter, thereby reducing ring. Sizes are available to fit all toms and snare drums, and they're easily removed, in case you don't want muffling on a certain drum in a certain song.



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Yamaha, Evans, and Noble & Cooley are some of the companies making these.

Another method of muffling from the outside is to use a rectangular piece of thin felt, taped onto the hoop and resting on the batter head (4 x 3 inches is good for most snare drums). When the drum is struck, the felt pops up and immediately flops back down, blocking out overtones.

Internals

Hardly any drum companies fit internal mufflers on their drums anymore, and with good reason. These devices press up on the head, against the drumhead's natural movement, choking the tone. Internal mufflers are adjustable for the degree of

dampening desired, unlike tape or donut rings, but go against sound physics. If you like the idea of variable muffling but don't want to sacrifice tone, rip the internals out of your drums, and use external clip-on mufflers instead. These devices clamp onto the hoop and press down on the batter head, reducing ring but not restricting the natural movement of the head.

Remo's Muffl is an internal device, consisting of a plastic tray, which sits on the bearing edge of the drum shell. The edge of the tray contacts the edge of the drumhead, cutting out excessive ring. A foam O-ring can be used inside the tray to further reduce overtones. The

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Drums...

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Muff'ls do modify the bearing edges of your shells (and with some drums, it's a blessing in disguise). They're not easily removable, as the drumhead must be taken off, but they'll provide a constant degree of muffling.

Another internal method is to use Deadringers, one of the first "alternate" muffling accessories. They are foam rings with a high-tack adhesive backing. A Deadringer sticks onto the underside of the head, giving a flat, thuddy sound. In the days of wet, toneless studio toms, they were the choice of a lot of drummers, but today their damping may be too extreme. They give a constant muffle and are not easily removed.

Kicks

The above methods all work well for snare drums and

toms. Bass drum damping is a bit different due to different sound requirements — nowadays the fashion is "flat and punchy." Remo Muff'ls, Deadringers, and external hoop-clamp mufflers (rare nowadays) will work efficiently on

underside of the batter head.

Removing the front head gives more volume and reduces ring, but it makes the shell more prone to structural damage and warping due to the weight of the toms and holder. Instead, leave the

Anything that inhibits the drum's natural tonality is a no-no.

bass drums. External mufflers can rattle, which is undesirable in miked situations.

Other ideas I've seen include a thin pillow placed inside the drum, touching the batter head; two inches of acoustical foam inside the drum; a foam block inside the bottom third of the drum (for instance, a Drum Muff); and felt stripping against the

front head on and cut a 10-inch hole in the center. This achieves practically the same effect as a single-headed drum, but protects the integrity of the shell.

My own method for bass drum damping is to use a Remo Muff'l with its foam O-ring, a 1 x 24-inch flat piece of acoustical foam lying on the bottom of the shell, just touch-

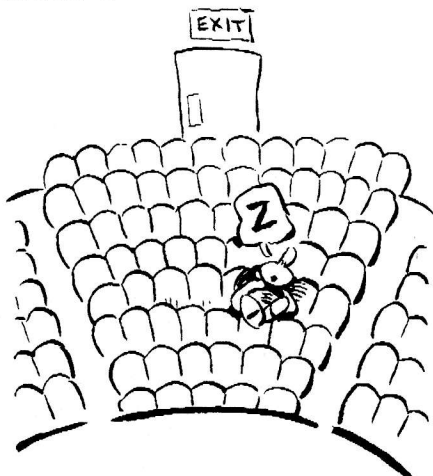
ing the front head (I don't have a hole cut out), and a 3 x 3-inch mylar square cut from an old drumhead, duct-taped onto the impact area for a "beater click" sound and head reinforcement.

Don't place fabric or carpeting underneath the batter head. This will reduce the tone of the drum, and give you the sound of a shoe box. Anything that inhibits the drum's natural tonality is a no-no; you only want to reduce the overring, not the sound.

The options are there; it's up to you to experiment with these various methods and find the one that gives you the sound you want. Write me c/o GIG with any questions or ideas you may have.

Bob Saydlowski, Jr. has been living, thinking, and playing drums for 20 years, as well as writing product reviews for Modern Drummer Magazine for the past 10 years.

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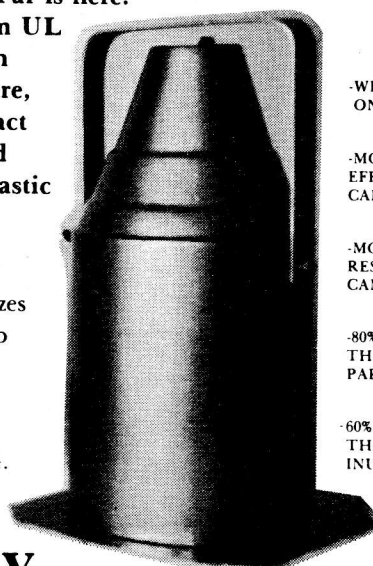
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